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SUBJECT: JAMMU AND KASHMIR ELECTIONS: SIXTH DOWN, ONE TO GO

REF: A. NEW DELHI 2987

- [1](#)B. NEW DELHI 2946
- [1](#)C. NEW DELHI 2746
- [1](#)D. NEW DELHI 2742
- [1](#)E. NEW DELHI 2378
- [1](#)F. NEW DELHI 2289
- [1](#)G. NEW DELHI 2265
- [1](#)H. NEW DELHI 2223
- [1](#)I. NEW DELHI 2146
- [1](#)J. NEW DELHI 2109
- [1](#)K. NEW DELHI 1799
- [1](#)L. NEW DELHI 1684

Classified By: Political Counselor Les Viguerie, Reasons 1.4 (B and D)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: The sixth round of state assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir went like the first five - record turnout, no violence, and no allegations of coercion. Voter turnout in this round was estimated at 65 percent, with dramatic increases from the 2002 election in constituencies that were considered sympathetic to separatist and jihadi sentiment. The continuing high participation rates in the state are being interpreted as a sign that Kashmiris see the elections as a means to replace the current government "from Delhi" with a government of their own that they feel will be more responsive to their demands for governance and water, electricity, roads, and other government services. The high turnout does not signal that Kashmiris no longer have grievances against India. These remain deep and profound. The Mumbai terrorist attacks do not appear to have been a factor in this round. It is not clear whether the relative low level of jihadi violence this year in the state is part of a jihadi strategy or whether the security environment in the valley is so overwhelming that the jihadis are unable to engage in any violence. End Summary.

Momentum Continues to Grow

[1](#)2. (U) In a continuation of the trend of the first five rounds of the Jammu and Kashmir state assembly elections (reftels), the sixth round on December 17 saw turnout that was higher than in the 2002 polls and higher than most political pundits had expected a month ago. Of the 16 seats contested in this round, 10 were in the Kashmir valley and six in the Jammu region. In the six rounds to date, 66 constituencies have already completed their polling. The remaining 21 contests will be held on December 24; results for all 87 seats will be declared shortly after counting is finished on December 28.

[1](#)3. (SBU) While final tallies are still not in, the tentative combined turnout for the 16 assembly seats was 64 percent, with each of the 16 seats showing a higher turnout than in 2002 (see para 11). What is especially noteworthy is that

the election districts where turnout jumped most dramatically are in south Kashmir, which was a hotbed of the Kashmir insurgency in the 1990s and where pollsters expected poor participation. The lowest turnout in this round was in Anantnag at 38 percent; in 2002, Anantnag registered a dismal 7 percent turnout. Participation in other previously extremist-dominated areas - Kokernag, Bijbehara, Noorabad - also increased sharply.

Still Violence Free

14. (C) Besides the high turnout, the biggest story of the rolling multi-phase elections in Jammu and Kashmir continues to be the absence of violence, from both jihadis and the security forces. No incident of violence was reported during the sixth round. Shujaat Bukhari of The Hindu told Poloff that "the polling was smooth." Television coverage showed long lines of voters, men as well as women, waiting patiently for hours to cast their votes. (Comment: It is not clear to us and our contacts as yet whether the relative low level of jihadi violence this year in the state, particularly during the elections, is part of a jihadi strategy to target other places in India instead or whether the security environment in the valley is so overwhelming that the jihadis are unable to engage in any violence.)

Security Tighter Than Necessary?

15. (SBU) As in the previous five phases, there were no

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reports of police or paramilitary forcing people to vote. Ahmed Ali Fayaz of the Daily Excelsior told Poloff, "It was like pre-1990. There was not a single allegation of coercion by security forces." Altaf Hussain of the BBC told Poloff that "polling had been peaceful, people went willingly and enthusiastically to vote." And, as has been the case since the Amarnath land use controversy erupted this summer (reftels), the security presence in the valley was tight. Perhaps, tighter than is necessary, according to BBC correspondent Altaf Hussain, who told Polloff that the security forces are becoming a bit "neurotic and overdoing it." In his view, Srinagar has had close to two weeks of effective curfew in the last two months and the people are getting tired of the barricades and security checks. He said he was stopped and checked ten times while covering the December 17 polling.

Reconfirmation of Development Agenda

16. (C) The sixth round of polling has served to reconfirm explanations offered in the first two rounds as to why Kashmiris are enthusiastically flocking to the polls in large numbers and rejecting the separatists calls for a boycott: Kashmiris see the elections as a way to replace the current government "from Delhi" (Governor's Rule) with a government of their own. They believe that a government they elect and install will be more responsive than a government from Delhi to their demands for water, electricity, roads, and other government services. There is growing consensus among political observers that Kashmiris do not see their participation in the elections as somehow abrogating their grievances against the Indian state, particularly its oppressive security presence.

Mumbai Not a Factor

17. (C) According to post interlocutors, the Mumbai terror attacks have been a non-factor in the four rounds of polling that have occurred since November 26. Kashmiris view the Mumbai attacks as a part of a global pan-Islamic movement, unrelated to the Kashmir issue between India and Pakistan.

Shujaat Bukhari of the The Hindu told Poloff: "the Mumbai incident has no impact in Kashmir. The people are not even debating this. They think the Mumbai violence was not part of the Kashmir game, so they are not concerned. Only concern is that Mumbai incident may lead to Kashmiri's harassment all over the country."

Looking at Outcomes

¶18. (C) The story in the Jammu and Kashmir elections for the GOI, the media and others outside observers so far has been the process of the elections. All have focused on the turnout, the call for the boycott, the potential for violence and the presence and role of the security agencies. As the elections cycle draws to a close on December 28, attention is beginning to shift to results and possible configurations that will come together to form the government. There were stories in the papers this week that the People's Democratic Party (PDP), a mainstream political party that appeals to those on the separatist end of the spectrum, would do well in the valley during this round because the contested seats are in areas formerly under the influence of extremists. Ahmed Ali Fayaz of the Daily Excelsior thinks the National Conference is emerging as the single largest party and has a presence all over the state. He believes the PDP and the Congress Party are handicapped because they are seen as the incumbent parties and each has appeal only in a part of the state. His predictions -- National Conference: 35 seats; PDP: 5 seats; Congress: 20 seats.

Public Campaigning

¶19. (SBU) There was hardly any public campaigning in the run-up to the first round of the poll on November 27. However, as successive rounds of polling have been successful in terms of both turnout and absence of violence, greater confidence has built among the candidates, the security forces and the electorate and we have begun to see more of the loud and colorful public campaigning with posters and flyers and rallies that is an Indian trademark. There have been large rallies addressed by the state's political

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heavyweights - Farookh Abdullah, Omar Abdullah, Muhammad Syed Mufti, Mehbooba Mufti and Ghulam Nabi Azad. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi have addressed rallies in the state. Opposition politicians such as L.K. Advani and Rajnath Singh have campaigned in the state as well.

Comment: Next Round the Hardest

¶10. (C) The GOI faces its hardest challenge on December 24, when the remaining 21 constituencies will go the polls. This next round includes eight seats in the valley, all in Srinagar where turnout was in the single digits in 2002. If Srinagar turns in another dismal turnout, it will cause some public relations damage to the GOI. But, the GOI has carefully sequenced the rolling Jammu and Kashmir elections to limit this damage. First, it has packaged the eight Srinagar seats with 13 seats in the Jammu region where high turnout will push the cumulative for the last phase to a respectable number. Second, the eight Srinagar seats comprise less than 10 percent of the total electorate and will not significantly move the statewide average turnout appreciably. Finally, the GOI probably has calculated that the international community will be paying less attention to election turnout number on the day before Christmas.

¶11. (U) Tentative turnout numbers in Phase VI:

--- Voter Turnout (%) ---

Region	District	2008	2002
Valley:	Noorabad	72	23
	Kulgam	60	24
	Home-shalibugh	49	23
	Anantnag	38	7
	Devsar	59	36
	Dooru	69	40
	Keokernag	57	15
	Shangus	68	25
	Bijbehera	58	17
	Pahalgam	56	33
Jammu:	Sishtwar	75	55
	Inderwal	72	57
	Doda	70	55
	Bhaderwal	66	54
	Ramban	64	58
	Banihal	63	41

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